

Senate Statistics

Sergeants at Arms

Wall Doxey (1943-1947)



Who is the only former senator to have served as Senate Sergeant at Arms? Today, the name "Wall Doxey" may not ring many bells outside his native Mississippi, but in 1943 his appointment to that post grabbed headlines in Washington. The news reports cast the fifty-year-old former legislator as the ideal person for the job. A fourteen-year veteran of service in the House and then the Senate, Doxey was widely known for his folksy manner and snow-white hair. When he assumed his post on February 1, 1943, he confessed that he knew little about its responsibilities and joked, "The only bad feature of the job is trying to spell 'sergeant'."

Wall Doxey was nobody's fool. Born in Holly Springs, Mississippi, on August 8, 1892, he earned his undergraduate and law degrees from the University of Mississippi. After being admitted to his state's bar in 1914, he opened a law practice in Holly Springs and for the next fifteen years served as county prosecutor and then district attorney. Long active in state Democratic politics, Doxey won a seat in the U.S. House in 1928 to represent Mississippi's second district. His service in that body coincided with the Great Depression, the New Deal recovery program, and outbreak of World War II. His vigorous support for farm-relief legislation and forest preservation earned him the approval of his rural constituency and easy reelection victories from 1930 to 1940. When Mississippi's senior senator, Pat Harrison, died in mid-1941, Doxey ran for the remaining year-and-a-half of his term. On September 23, 1941, he defeated another House member by fewer than 600 votes out of 118,000 cast.

Doxey took his Senate oath on September 29 and obtained a choice assignment on the Appropriations Committee. Within weeks, however, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, Congress declared war, and a sense of dire emergency gripped the nation's capital. While trying to promote legislation helpful to Mississippi's agricultural interests, Doxey also had to organize his 1942 campaign for election to a full Senate term. That race attracted three other candidates, including [James O. Eastland](#). Although Doxey had President Franklin Roosevelt's active support, Eastland ran against the Washington bureaucracy

and easily defeated Doxey. (Years later Eastland influenced the career of another future Sergeant at Arms when he hired James Ziglar as a legislative aide.)

While a senator, Doxey had won the confidence and friendship of the Senate's second most senior member, Tennessee's [Kenneth McKellar](#). Early in January 1943, as the fifty-year-old Doxey considered future employment options, McKellar had a suggestion. Why not run for the Sergeant at Arms' job? But the Senate already had a Sergeant at Arms. Chesley Jurney had been enjoying that post for the past ten years and showed no signs of wanting to leave. McKellar had other plans.

Senator McKellar's dissatisfaction with Sergeant at Arms Jurney stemmed from an incident that took place on a Saturday afternoon six weeks earlier. On November 14, 1942, during Senate debate on a civil rights measure, Majority Leader [Alben Barkley](#) directed Sergeant at Arms Jurney to round up the five absent members—all southerners—needed to provide a quorum for business. Jurney sent Deputy Sergeant at Arms J. Mark Trice to Senator McKellar's apartment at the Mayflower Hotel with an arrest warrant. No fan of the legislation under consideration, McKellar refused to answer his phone. Trice then convinced the senator's maid to open the apartment door. Surprised to see Trice, who diplomatically neglected to mention the arrest warrant, the elderly senator agreed to accompany him back to the Capitol. As the Sergeant at Arms' car approached the Senate wing, McKellar realized what was up. As a press aide later recalled, "His face grew redder and redder. By the time the car reached the Senate entrance, McKellar shot out and barreled through the corridors to find the source of his summons. He was so angry with Barkley that he would not speak to him for months."

At the January 7, 1943, organizing caucus of the majority Democrats, Texas Senator Tom Connally routinely nominated Jurney for another term. Immediately, McKellar responded by nominating Wall Doxey—one of the other southern senators who had refused to answer Barkley's November 1942 summons. When a senator questioned possible irregularities "relative to certain official financial transactions" by Jurney, the caucus appointed several members to investigate. Within two weeks, the caucus reassembled to receive Jurney's request that he not be reappointed Sergeant at Arms. While no documentation of "financial irregularities" survives, there is ample evidence that McKellar held Jurney responsible for his Saturday afternoon summons to the Capitol. The Democratic caucus then elected Doxey for a term beginning February 1, 1943.

In 1943, the Sergeant at Arms occupied two Senate-wing suites that are today known as S-212 (vice president's staff) and S-229 (Republican Legislative Scheduling Office). S-212, located off the Senate Reception Room, served as Doxey's public office. There he displayed, in four large frames, photographs of all ninety-six incumbent senators, arranged by state. A journalist explained that this was done "so that visiting constituents can view with pride their native sons who made good." (Several years ago, the Cabinet Shop discovered frames containing pictures of the 1945 Senate and transferred them to the Senate Historical Office where they continue to be appreciated.)

World War II severely added to the Sergeant at Arms' security burdens. Visitors were required to leave briefcases and packages with police officers at the Capitol's entrances. Several days after Doxey assumed his duties, a policeman burst into his office with a briefcase containing what was described as "a suspicious-looking missile resembling a torpedo." Just as Doxey and several aides began to inspect the "missile," a newsman called to inquire about reports that a bomb had been brought into the Capitol. Despite a moment of concern, Doxey and his staff continued their examination and discovered that "the cigar-shaped combination of flanges and fins" belonged to the chief executive of a large defense contractor who had brought the model to use in briefing key senators. When the Republicans took control of the Senate in January 1947, Doxey packed his bags and moved to a new position as hearing examiner for the Department of Agriculture. At year's end, he returned home to Holly Springs, where he resumed his law practice until 1948, when poor health forced his retirement.

He died in Memphis, Tennessee, on March 2, 1962.